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# Two tell a story of foray into Laos

## Mission sought POWs, say ex-Green Berets

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LOS ANGELES — Two teams of Laotian resistance soldiers, organized, equipped and financed by the United States, crossed into Laos from Thailand on Nov. 15 seeking to obtain photographic evidence that American prisoners of war are still alive and being held in Laos, according to two ex-Green Berets who supported the operation.

The operation, of which the Pentagon said it had no knowledge, was at least the second such secret foray by American-backed Laotians in the last year. It is not known what happened to the reconnaissance teams dispatched in November.

The two nine-man guerrilla units, participating in what was code-named "Operation Grand Eagle," were bound for four camp sites where recently gathered intelligence reportedly showed at least 39 Americans are being held. The teams left Thailand from different locations and intended to meet in Laos.

The Laotians were made available to the United States by Vang Pao, a former Lao major general who, during the height of US involvement in Southeast Asia, commanded some 40,000 anticommunist tribesmen who served as a secret army for the CIA.

In arranging the November foray, Vang Pao, who today lives on a barley ranch in Montana, collaborated with James G. Gritz, a 43-year-old retired Green Beret lieutenant colonel and much-decorated Vietnam veteran who lives in Los Angeles. Gritz and Vang Pao first discussed the mission last July in the Los Angeles office of Rep. Robert K. Dornan, a conservative Republican from Los Angeles who is an announced candidate for the US Senate.

Vang Pao, in a telephone interview, denied entering into an agreement with Gritz. But Gritz possesses a letter of introduction si

training mission. In addition, Rep. Dornan confirmed that one of his aides was present when Gritz and Vang Pao were discussing the plan.

Deputy CIA Director Bobby Ray Inman, who met with Gritz in December to discuss the reconnaissance plan and the prisoner-of-war issue, denied "to the best of my knowledge" that any government agency was involved in supporting the November mission. He did not deny that the mission took place, and acknowledged that government intelligence agencies have had contacts with various private groups concerning POWs over the last several years. Inman said, however, that these contacts had not yielded any "solid information."

Adm. Allan G. Paulson of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the Pentagon's intelligence arm and the group charged with official responsibility for investigating reports of missing POWs, declined through a spokesman to comment on the November mission. A Pentagon spokesman said the Department of Defense had no knowledge of it.

In a series of interviews with The Globe, Gritz said he had been contacted last June about the POW situation by a secret military intelligence agency that was created in the aftermath of the failed rescue of American hostages in Iran in 1980. Gritz would not reveal the agency's name or whom it reports to.

The elite unit, Gritz said, is patterned after the British Strategic Air Service and similar organizations in Israel and West Germany, and is designed to transcend an often-cumbersome Joint Chiefs of Staff bureaucracy and take direct action in situations where Americans abroad find themselves in life-threatening situations. The organization generates its own intelligence and has a Special Forces unit assigned to it, according to intelligence sources. Dornan, in an interview, said he knew of the group's existence but had not been told its name.

Gritz said the government agency gave him \$40,000 in several cash payments over the second half of last year in order to equip Vang Pao's Laotians and send three

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